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DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KPKO](#) [UNSC](#) [AU](#) [CD](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: SURGE IN REBEL ACTIVITY IN DARFUR

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Daily Government of Sudan helicopter gunship overflights of El Fasher, rebel movements from Tine to Tawilla, and a sharp increase in banditry - particularly against international non-governmental organizations, all highlight a recent increase in rebel activity in Darfur. Such activity can be traditionally attributed to the advent of the rainy season, but with the Justice and Equality Movement's pledge to repeat an attack on Khartoum, no scenario should be discounted. The United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur remains largely impotent as a result of engineering and equipment deficits, and the expected departure of PAE by July 14 will only further delay the Mission's response time. Post urges that we use all fora at our disposal to reiterate a message of restraint to all parties and to make positive movement toward appointing a mediator to get the peace process re-started.
END SUMMARY.

JEM IN NORTH DARFUR AND THE GOS KNOWS IT

¶2. (SBU) On June 13 and 14, Government of Sudan (GoS) helicopter gunships (three to four are typically parked at the El Fasher Airport on any given day) were flying low over El Fasher beginning at approximately 0830. Later on June 14 a Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) Field Commander called FieldOff to report that he, along with other JEM members, were ten kilometers outside Kutum, approximately 70 km northwest of El Fasher, North Darfur, to pick up vehicles. He noted that he had moved several days earlier from Tine, West Darfur, on the northern part of the border between Sudan and Chad, through Jebel Marra, where representatives of several armed movements in Darfur have been convening over the past days. The JEM commander acknowledged that the GoS gunships had been dispatched at news that JEM was in the region. In response to FieldOff's questions about a possible rebel move on El Fasher, given JEM's relative proximity to the North Darfur capital, the commander said there was nothing to worry about.

¶3. (SBU) The JEM commander inquired about the recent fighting near Um Kadada in North Darfur (reftel) between Sudan Liberation Army/Unity and the Sudan Armed Forces. He had nothing to add on casualty figures beyond agreeing with the assessment that each side would try to trump the other in the media on this point, per usual practice in such clashes. A Joint Mediation Support Team (JMST) officer noted that rumors of JEM-SLA/Unity collaboration were rife (which would unite the two largest Zaghawa rebel groups) and JEM has not ruled out the possibility of joining forces with other Darfur rebel factions, at one point telling FieldOff during the week of June 9 that there had already been many military defections from SLA groups to JEM's ranks and that all were welcome except "the bandit" Abdalla Banda, commander of JEM/Collective Leadership.

¶4. Presidential Assistant Minni Minawi also called CDA Fernandez from North Darfur on June 14. Minawi complained of Sudanese Government harassment (a government he is still a part of) and ambush attempts as he passed near Kutum around June 11. Minni is concerned that more of his wavering commanders may defect to SLA/Unity or JEM.

15. (SBU) On June 15 the same JEM commander called FieldOff to say he had moved and was now in Tawilla, approximately 60 km west of El Fasher. He warned against any travel to this area of North Darfur, as "forces are moving everywhere" [NOTE: A member of the JMST had contacted FieldOff the evening of June 14 to discuss the possibility of a visit to this area of North Darfur during the week of June 15. END NOTE]. The JEM commander said he and his entourage would on June 16 return to Tine, where JEM political leadership was currently stationed. The commander confirmed reports of the movement of Chadian rebels from West Darfur to Chad during the latter part of the week of June 9, a movement which precipitated the rebel offensive in Goz Beida, eastern Chad, on June 14.

"WHAT IS UNAMID DOING?"

16. (SBU) The JEM Field Commander asked what UNAMID was doing to address the ceasefire violations and to re-start the Darfur peace process, given its perceived bias in favor of the GoS. FieldOff responded that as long as ceasefire violations continued on all sides, including by the armed movements, UNAMID's role would likely remain limited. FieldOff also informed of JMST's planned visits around Darfur during the week of June 16 (the team is currently in El Geneina), and the JEM commander reiterated his plea that the JMST and UNAMID stay in touch with all sides, not just the GoS, to maintain the perception of impartiality.

17. (SBU) FieldOff informed UNAMID Force Commander GEN Agwai of JEM's movements in North Darfur and complaints with regard to UNAMID's lack of a response. GEN Agwai did not see a proactive role for UNAMID in enforcing the ceasefire agreement, saying, "If two sides want to fight, what can UNAMID do? Pick one side and join in the fight against the other?" GEN Agwai said he was never adverse to talking to any of the armed movements and dismissed charges that UNAMID was talking only to the GoS. He saw rebel consolidation as the only way forward for peace talks and expected movement in this realm within the coming weeks.

PRE-RAINY SEASON BANDITRY SPIKES IN DARFUR

18. (SBU) Along with heightened tensions between the GoS and the rebel movements is a sharp increase in the number of incidents of car-jackings and banditry throughout Darfur. Attacks in El Fasher, for example, occur on a daily basis and are brazen, usually conducted at midday, often at residential compounds, and are more often than not aimed exclusively at the INGO community. FieldOff warned the JEM field commander to refrain from such attacks given his comments that he and his colleagues were "picking up" vehicles in North Darfur [NOTE: JEM has historically been a repeat offender in INGO car-jackings, on both sides of the Chad-Sudan border. Vehicles are either converted to rebel use or sold on the black market in Chad. END NOTE].

19. (SBU) COMMENT. These reports point to a recent increase in rebel activity in Darfur and may portend a "surge" toward a renewed rebel offensive. It is not out of the ordinary for rebels and government forces alike to scramble for positions and assets in the run-up to the rainy season, often at the expense of the INGO community. This pretext aside, other conditions make it a favorable time to make a move, not least a UNAMID that is distracted by deployment and contracting obstacles (it has still not named a replacement for PAE, and it just unilaterally terminated its catering contract through PAE, which means troops will be without food as of July 14). The international community needs to step in and use all tools/fora at its disposal to reiterate a message of restraint to all parties. Embassy Khartoum is doing so with both the GOS and UNAMID officials.

It also needs to make positive movement toward appointing a mediator to get the all too lackadaisical UN/AU led peace process re-started, especially if rumors of a rebel consolidation on the ground prove true. Such a consolidation, while bad news for the Khartoum regime, could lead to even more suffering and displacement for Darfur's civilian population.

FERNANDEZ